

# THE OSTERLIND BREAKTHROUGH CARD SYSTEM

by Richard Osterlind



20th Anniversary Edition

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**First Electronic Edition**

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“The discovery of the Breakthrough System is an amazing achievement. It is a fine testament to the value of perseverance. Mr. Osterlind conducted his search with no guarantee of success, and with the odds...enormously against finding a system that works and is easy to remember. That he was able to find one, working entirely by hand, is nothing short of astonishing.”

—Robin Dawes from *An Analysis of Richard Osterlind's Breakthrough Card System*

## Introduction

The Osterlind Card System (also referred to as the Breakthrough Card System) is my finest achievement. On its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I am laying it out here for all to possess in the hope that it will take its rightful place in the annals of card magic. I do this because, in all honesty, ownership of this system cannot be claimed, as it is not an invention, but a discovery. From the day the first modern deck of 52 playing cards was printed, this system existed, waiting only to be found. I was the one who looked for and uncovered it, penned its explanation, and now am happy to gift it to the magic world. I can speak in the most glowing terms of its beauty and practicality with no personal egotism involved, as it is independent of me. I hope all magicians will take the time to understand what follows and the enormity of its possibilities.

Long before Double Lifts, Second Deals, False Counts and jugglery with playing cards, there existed the basic effect of discovering a selected card. All classic card magic literature addresses this basic effect first and to lower its importance is not being honest or historically accurate. There are thousands of wonderful presentations available to the magician using nothing more than this device and the few I have chosen to use over the years have served me well. Locations come in many forms and the stacked deck is only one of them. It can be, however, equal or superior to any other method in the right situations and when handled professionally. All one has to do is glimpse the card above the one removed to know the selection's identity. The predominant problem with many stacks is the possibility of the spectator discovering the system. If this issue is eliminated entirely, you have a powerful tool.

In order to have a deck stacked so as to avoid detection, the cards must appear to be in a completely random sequence. There are two

ways to accomplish this. The first is to have the cards memorized or mathematically linked to the number in the stack in which they lie. The second is to have each card leading to the next using some type of formula. While present thinking seems to favor the first, I never was lead in that direction. In truth, I never believed knowing at what position a card lay in a deck to be nearly of equal and practical value as knowing what the next card in the stack was. Yes, a removed card can be determined with a memorized deck, but that method requires two steps. First, one must determine the number the known card lies at, then one must compute the card for the next number. This takes time and offers twice the possibility of mistakes in actual performing situations. The second method of simply learning the next card mathematically from the one before it is much simpler and expedient. This is the situation with the Osterlind Card System. Because so many magicians have asked me how I came up with the system, I will try to explain the events as best as I can remember.

Let me first put you in the frame of mind I was in over 20 years ago when I began working on this. I had been performing for years in all types of situations and I had learned the importance of a good stacked deck. After using the Si Stebbins system in the beginning of my career, I advanced to the Eight-Kings arrangement. This setup looked less suspicious than the first, but still could not stand up to close scrutiny or the deck left in the hands of a spectator. It occurred to me that if a deck could be stacked so that its order looked entirely haphazard, that artifice, combined with a few false shuffles, could create miracles. I played with the Nikola system for a while, but it didn't really satisfy me for the reasons listed above. It was the idea of a mathematically, stacked deck that really intrigued me.

One day, I decided to begin looking for such a system. Please remember, at this time, I had no idea if such a setup were even feasible. As a matter of fact, upon reflection, it seemed more impossible than possible. Think about the problem. A deck of cards is made up of 4 sets



of 13 values! Isn't that an oddball situation in our base 10 number system? If you had to design a deck of cards from scratch, wouldn't you suggest something like 5 sets of 10? Would you ever come up with 4 sets of 13? Then the goal was to come up with a mathematical formula for arranging those cards into a random appearing order with suits and values appearing in all sorts of haphazard places while still following an unbreakable rule. Cap this off with the idea that in a perfect stack, the 52<sup>nd</sup> card must lead back to the first so the whole system is an endless chain! That is where I began. At the time I was working with my father in his tool & die shop. I always had a grease-covered deck at hand in order to practice sleights and routines whenever a machine was set to make a cut and I had to wait for it to perform its duty. About the only thing to commend that deck was, after the abuse it had taken, it still contained 52 cards. My first thought in devising a system was to use a combination of the numerical values of the cards coupled with a numerical value for the suits. Years before, when working with the Si Stebbins stack, it had occurred to me the CHaSeD order of arranging cards was an invented one. Intrinsic in a deck, however, was Spades = 1 (one point), Hearts = 2 (2 curves), Clubs = 3 (3 leaves) and Diamonds = 4 (4 points). This seemed to me to be the preferred order. Since my system was to be a perfect mathematical stack, I decided this was to be the suit designation.

My first thought was to simply add together the card value with its suit value to come up with a new value for the next card. (If the number went over 13, I would just eliminate 13 to bring the number back to a workable value.) With just a little experimentation, it was obvious that such a setup would never have two card values together in the stack. Since a randomly mixed deck of cards would certainly show some equal card values side by side, that idea was eliminated. After pondering the problem a bit, I decided to double the value of the card before adding on the suit value. Playing with this idea for a while, I discovered that each value in the deck would have four other cards

leading to it. As an example, the 2S, AC, 8H and 7D all lead to a value of 5. The 5S, 4C, JH and 10D all lead to a Jack. This is true of all 13 values. Since this was exactly what I needed, I was delighted. I decided to use this equation and move on to determining the suit value of the new card.

Perhaps my mind has purposely destroyed any memory of the numerous methods I tried back then to figure out the suits. What I do remember is that what seemed initially to be an easy problem, turned out to be anything but. I tried every conceivable way of tying together the first card's numerical value and its suit value to determine the suit of the new card. After the first two days, I discovered that all the obvious methods I had been sure would work, wouldn't. I tried time after time to come up with a simple formula that made sense. I can vaguely remember picking up that dirty, old deck and starting to set it up based on some new theory I had devised that day or the night before only to have the system lead to a card already used. Sometimes a single card would be its own dead end by leading back to itself. After a week or so, I found myself repeating some of the same ideas I had already discarded which necessitated making elaborate notes of what didn't work on whatever paper available. Often, I became so groggy that I would make mistakes in my computations and would have to retry the whole method a second or third time to verify it was a failure. Weeks went by and I grew more and more depressed. Finally, I just about gave up on the idea and put the deck aside with the thought that it was hopeless.

It was about a month after I first began working on the problem that I was leaning against a Bridgeport miller, watching the hardened metal bit cut out a 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch slot from the metal bar clamped into its vise. The automatic feed was moving the machine's table slowly and I was getting a bit high breathing in the vapors from the smoking oil used to lubricate the cutter. Anyone who has ever worked in a machine shop will know the aroma immediately. As I daydreamed, I spotted the deck ly-

ing on my toolbox next to a micrometer and my scattered notes. Fighting the urge to pick it up and practice my Pass or some new Double Lift, I just pondered all the ways that deck had let me down over the past weeks. Suddenly, the thought occurred to me that since each card in the stack had to have numerical properties that lead to the next card, then its suit value was part of that equation. That also meant the suit had to be dependent on both the new card's value and the value of the suit of the card before it. To put it a different way, the new card's value and the old card's suit would determine the new card's suit.

There are 4 suit values and you can't divide the 13 numerical values by 4. On what I would now call an "enlightened whim," I decided to assign the 10s and court cards an equal value and categorize them into one group (just like in Blackjack.) They would represent  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the values. The other  $\frac{3}{4}$  or A thru 9 values I divided up into 3 sets consisting of A 2 3 – 4 5 6 – 7 8 9. As I worked this out in my mind, it started "feeling right."

Each of these sets would have to represent a "relationship" to the suit of the first card, not a suit itself. Again, going on a whim, I decided to let the first group (A 2 3) represent the "same" suit as the first card. For instance, if the first card is the Ace of Spades, the next card's values would be a 3 ( $1 \times 2 + 1 = 3$ ). Since a 3 falls into the "same" category, its suit will also be Spades. So the card after the Ace of Spades would be the 3 of Spades.

I next decided to let the second group (4 5 6) become the "opposite" suit category. (By that, I mean the suit will be the other one of the same color – Spades/Clubs - Hearts/Diamonds.) So, if the 7 of Clubs leads to a 4 ( $7 \times 2 + 3 = 17 - 13 = 4$ ) and 4 is in the "opposite" category, then the card would be the 4 of Spades.

For the third group (7 8 9), I decided to use the "before" category. This means the suit than comes before the one you are working from. Remember the suits are Spades = 1, Hearts = 2, Clubs = 3 and Diamonds = 4 (Diamonds comes "before" Spades). So if the 3 of

Clubs leads to a 9 ( $3 \times 2 + 3 = 9$ ) and 9 is in the "before" category, then the card would be the 9 of Hearts.

Finally, I gave the 4<sup>th</sup> group (10 J Q K) the "after" category. So if the 5 of Spades leads to a J ( $5 \times 2 + 1 = 11$  or J) and J is in the "after" category, then the card would be the Jack of Hearts.

I thought all this out while standing at the machine. After contemplating it for a while, I decided to put it to the test. Somehow, I had a real good feeling about what I had just worked out. Picking up the deck, I started going through the cards, laying them out on the workbench starting with the Ace of Spades. As I went along, I noticed how random the order of the cards appeared. Each card was leading to a new one almost like real magic. As I approached the end of the deck, I grew more and more excited. Finally, I laid down the last card – the King of Spades – and realized that it led right back to the Ace of Spades. Frankly, I was stunned! I picked up the deck and started re-working the entire stack one card at a time just to make sure there were no mistakes. There weren't.

I don't remember being more excited about anything in magic than I was at that moment. I knew I had found something beautiful, unique and extraordinary. The years have proven this and the system has gotten the highest accolades from some of the best minds in magic. I still and will always consider this my finest achievement.

So to those who have asked me how I figured this out, that is the story. I really do believe there is a part of our brain that works constantly on problems even when we are not conscientiously thinking of them. As long as we never believe something is impossible, our minds will eventually find the solution.



## The System

**T**he Osterlind Breakthrough Card System is a random appearing stack of a deck of 52 playing cards. Each card leads to the next in a definite mathematical progression with the last card of the stack leading back to the first.

The following procedure is used to establish the order of the cards in the system. Each computation will involve two playing cards. The first card is the one that is known and the second is the one which needs to be determined. Each of the cards will have a value equal to its

number with the Ace = 1, Jack = 11, Queen = 12 and King = 13.

There will be times in our computations when a numerical value will go over 13. When this happens, 13 will be subtracted immediately, bringing the number back to a value of 1 through 13. This happens most frequently when card values of 7 through King are doubled.

The chart below shows these cards, their values when doubled, and the result after 13 is subtracted. It is good advice to study it and commit it to memory.

CARD	DOUBLED	MINUS 13	MEMORY AID
7	14	1	7 resembles 1 printed
8	16	3	3 resembles 8 halved
9	18	5	5 resembles 9 upside down
10	20	7	1 resembles 7 printed
J or 11	22	9	Jack O'Lantern / Cat with 9 lives
Q or 12	24	11	Queen loves the Jack
K	26	13	Kings cancel themselves out



Each suit will also have a numerical value using the following table:

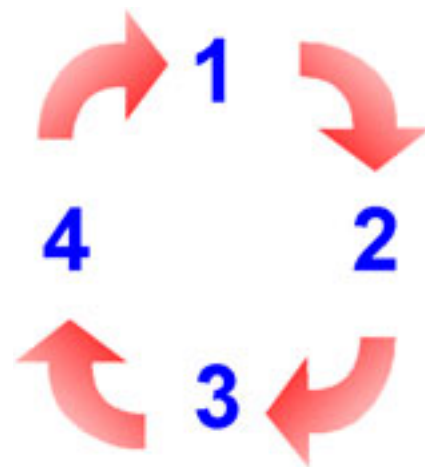
SUIT	VALUE	REASON
Spades	1	One point on top of the spade symbol
Hearts	2	Two rounded areas on top of the heart symbol
Clubs	3	Three rounded "leafs" in the club symbol
Diamonds	4	Four points in the diamond symbol

The order of the suit values will be considered as a continuous loop with "4" progressing back to "1" as in the diagram at right.

The procedure to determine each card will be in two steps. The first step will determine the value of the second card and the second step will determine the suit.

### Step One - The Value

Start with the value of the first card, double it and add on its suit value. Here are some examples (and please note how important the preceding memory aids are!):



ORIGINAL CARD	VALUE DOUBLED	PLUS SUIT VALUE	RESULT
3D	6	4	10
AS	2	1	3
4C	8	3	11 (JACK)
8H	3 (16 - 13)	2	5
KC	13 (26 - 13)	3	3 (16 - 13)
9D	5 (18 - 13)	4	9

## Step Two - The Suit

The value of the second card and the suit of the first card determine the suit of the second card. If the value of the second card is A, 2 or 3, the suit is the *same* as the suit of the first card. (See the following table for examples.)

IF VALUE IS A - 2 - 3	
FIRST CARD	SECOND CARD
AS	3S
7S	2S
QC	AC

If the value of the second card is 4, 5 or 6, the suit is the *opposite* of the suit of the first card. Here we mean the suit is the same color but the opposite suit. Spades and Clubs are opposites; Hearts and Diamonds are opposites.. (See the following table for examples.)

IF VALUE IS 4 - 5 - 6	
FIRST CARD	SECOND CARD
2S	5C
7D	5H
KD	4H

If the value of the second card is 7, 8 or 9, the suit is the one *before* the suit of the first card. Thus, Hearts is before Clubs; Diamonds is before Spades. (See the following table for examples.)

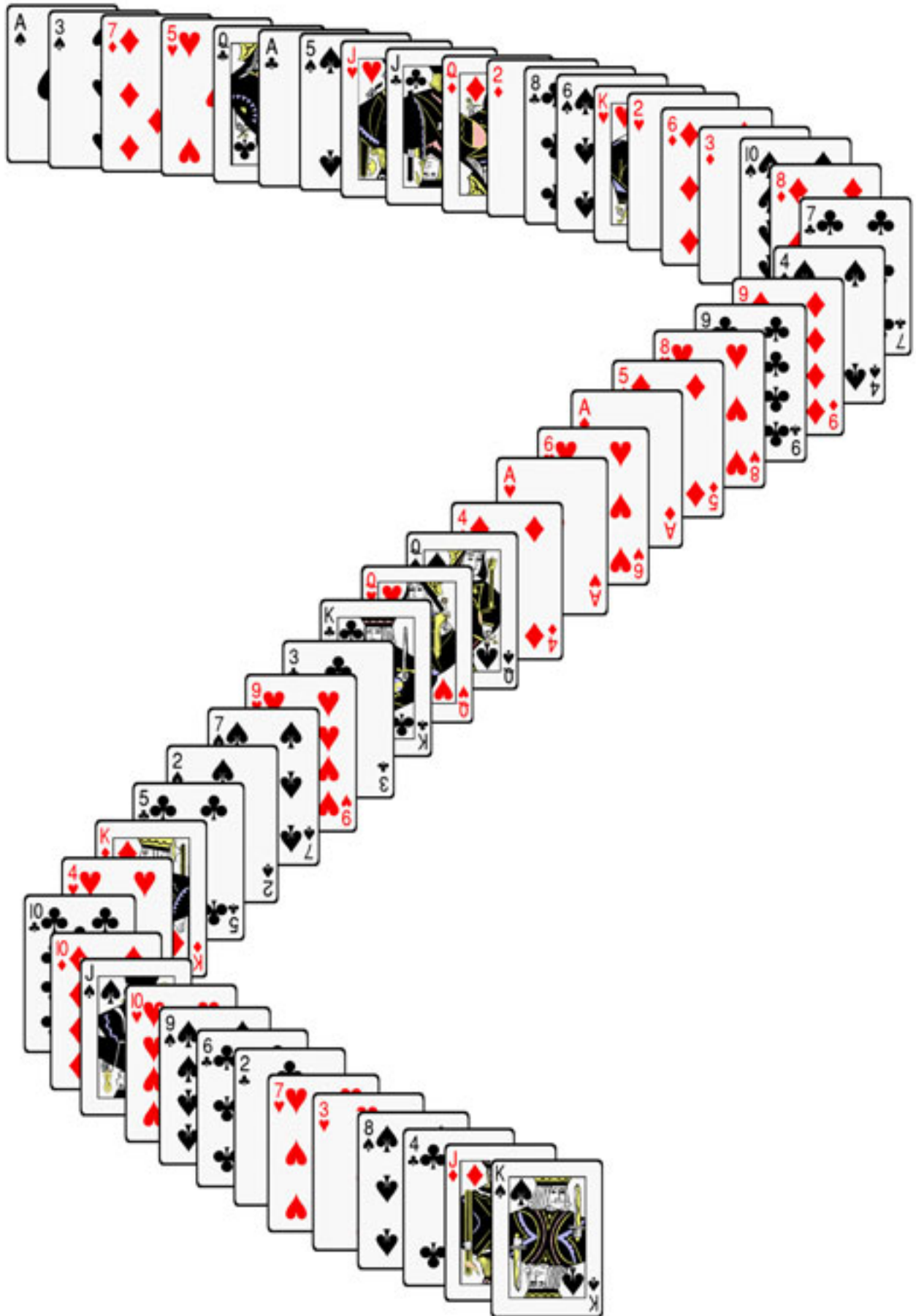
IF VALUE IS 7 - 8 - 9	
FIRST CARD	SECOND CARD
3S	7D
10H	9S
3C	9H

If the value of the second card is 10, J, Q or K, the suit is the one *after* the suit of the first card. Thus, Clubs is after Hearts; Spades is after Diamonds. (See the following table for examples.)

IF VALUE IS 10 - J - Q - K	
FIRST CARD	SECOND CARD
6S	KH
3D	10S
JC	QD



# The Stack



# Hints On Performing With The Osterlind Card System

## Counting Up!

The first consideration in using the Osterlind Card System to its maximum capabilities is the quick calculation of the next card in the stack. Doubling the card value must be almost instantaneous. For card values of A through 6 that should present no problem. When you see a 3, think 6. When you see a 5, think 10. The Kings also present no problems because they equal 13 and cancel themselves out. Therefore the shortcuts mentioned earlier in the system explanation concerning the values 7 through Q are of vital importance. When you see, for instance, an 8, you must instantly think 3. When you see 5, you should instantly think 9. There are only 6 numbers to remember and they should present no problem. As you begin to use the system, you will see how easy it becomes.

The next calculation trick is one I call “Counting Up!” I talked about this on my *Challenge Magic* video, but this is the first time I am putting it in print. I will explain it from my point of view.

Let’s say I see the 2 of Clubs. I immediately double the 2 and think 4. Then, instead of adding the 3 for the Clubs, I count up 3 like this, “5, 6, 7.” If my sighted card is the 5 of Diamonds, I think, “10, Jack, Queen, King, Ace.” Do you see the benefits? First, it is quick and sure-fire. There is no worry about making a mathematical mistake. Second, if the number goes over 13, I don’t have to worry about subtracting 13 from the result. I automatically say Ace after a King and keep on going.

Here is another example. The card sighted is the 6 of Diamonds. I think, “Queen, King, Ace, 2, 3. See? You will find yourself doing this so quickly that you would have trouble vocalizing it as fast as you can think it.

If I am dealing with numbers from 7 through Queen, I apply the same process using the shortcuts. Let’s say the card is the 9 of Clubs. I look at the card and think, “5, 6, 7, 8.” If the card is the Jack of Hearts, I think, “9, 10, Jack.” The easiest cards are the Kings. Just use the suit value. For instance, if I see the King of Clubs, I just think “3.” The King of Diamonds is “4.”

Adding on the suit is also almost instantaneous. Once you learn the groupings, your mind will take over. You will see the 8 of Hearts and you will think, “3, 4, 5 of Diamonds.” For the 10 of Clubs, you will think, “7, 8, 9, 10 of Diamonds.” For the 4 of Spades, you think, “8, 9 of Hearts.”

People who I have personally taught this to were able to work the system almost as fast as I can in only half an hour. Just take the process one step at a time until you thoroughly understand it. Then it will become second nature. The best way to practice is to set up a deck in the stack. Cut it anywhere and deal the top card face up onto the table. As soon as you see it, try to compute the next card. After you name it, turn over the top card and see if you’re right. Deal it face up on the card already there and continue going. See how fast you can get through the deck. Practicing this way makes it like a game. It feels rewarding the faster you go. After just a few runthroughs of the deck, you will have it down.

## False Shuffles

You must appear to shuffle the stacked deck to gain the full advantage of the effects. There are so many false shuffles in so many books that it is mind-boggling. I was groomed on the Tarbell course and the most basic false shuffles that are found in Volume One, Lesson 13 still serve me well.

One that I use is the G. W. Hunter Shuffle. Briefly, this is an overhand shuffle where, after throwing the top half of the deck into the left hand, six cards are run singly and the bottom half is thrown on top while holding a break.

The process is repeated by cutting to the break, running the same six cards and throwing the balance on top. This leaves the order of the deck undisturbed.

Another false shuffle I use from the same lesson is the Riffle False Shuffle. Briefly, the cards are riffle shuffled, allowing the inner corners to interlace. As you appear to push the two halves together, the fingers mask the fact that the cards are pulled apart and one half placed on the other. I perform this one on my knee while standing.

There are other shuffles in this lesson as well as a number of false cuts. Because you can actually give the deck legitimate cuts, there is a lot of leeway in the kinds of false cuts and shuffles you use. Look them up in Tarbell Volume One for more detail.

## **Peeks**

Of paramount importance in using any stacked deck is the ability to secretly sight (or peek) the card above the one removed. As a card worker you may have a number of ways of doing this in quite a clever manner. Let me, however, give you the methods that I actually use. You may be surprised to see that they are anything but complicated!

### **The Turn Away Peek**

This peek can be used in almost all the effects. For example, let's use the very simple procedure where a card is removed from the deck and you name it. False shuffle and spread the deck for a selection. As soon as the card is removed break the deck at that point and place the top half under the bottom half. This places the card above their selection on the bottom of the deck.

You now need to peek that card to learn the selection. The failsafe way I have developed is as follows. As soon as the card is removed and the cut completed start to turn away and say, "Don't let me see either the front or

the back of your card." This seems very fair as it negates the idea that the cards are marked or that you can see the selected card.

Now as you ask the spectator to look at the card and concentrate on it, you have the perfect opportunity to glance down at your left hand and tilt the deck just slightly enough for you to see the bottom card. If you use a few animated gestures with your hands, you will also have the perfect misdirection to spot the key card. Because you are turned away, no one can see where you are looking and all attention is on the spectator. Simple as this method is, it is foolproof.

This same "turn away" idea can be also used if the spectator has the deck in his own hands when he selects a card. Have the person cut the cards a number of times and then take either the top or bottom card. As he hands you back the rest of the deck, make a show of turning away and use the opportunity to get your peek. Taking a step or two away from the spectator helps the procedure. It imparts the impression that all the importance is on the selected card and not the rest of the deck.

### **A Very Basic Peek**

This idea is from Corinda. As soon as a card is selected and the key controlled to the bottom, tell the spectator to hold the card against his chest like this. This is where you place the rest of the deck against your own chest. Tell him to look down at his card. You demonstrate how he is to do this and see the key card in the process!

This is a perfect example of how simple you can work if there is a logical reason for your actions.

### **The Distance Peek**

This is not so much a handling, but a stage maneuver. Give the deck to a spectator and have him or her select a card by the cutting method explained above. As they are cutting, step back



farther and farther away from them.

After they select a card, have them place it into their pocket. If you have moved far enough away, you will find the spectator will be less on guard and will often flash the bottom card to you. The farther away you stand from the spectator the better the chances he will.

If he does not, you merely approach him, take back the rest of the deck and get your peek a different way. You will be surprised, however, at how many times you will not have to.

When you do catch the glimpse you can end your effect from across the room without even touching or coming near the deck. That makes the effect totally impossible in the minds of the spectators!

## The Open Peek

This is one more glimpsing method that is very easy and yet very effective. Again, spread the cards in your hands and have a card selected. As soon as the card is withdrawn, cut the deck at that point and complete the cut. Now, turn the deck face up as you turn your head away and spread the cards. Say, "As you can see the cards are all different and all mixed up." You make no attempt to try to see any cards just yet.

As soon as you have done this, you square up the deck and turn your head back just as you are turning the deck facedown. You will be able to catch a quick glimpse of the bottom card as you do. The timing is crucial here. You must turn back just as the deck is turned facedown. If done correctly, you give the impression that you never saw a single card.

*All of the above peeking methods are effective and workable. They all rely on attitude and timing rather than sleight of hand. I am going to give you 2 more methods that are gems. These peeks are my own invention. Because I demonstrated them to a few magician friends, you might have seen something like*

*them before in other books. Rest assured these are my creations and I have been doing them for years.*

## The Osterlind Peek Pass

I am very proud of this next move. It utilizes the Pass in a totally different way and gets the most out of the move. It works partially on the "Turn Away" principle explained before. In addition, it looks as clean as possible and accomplishes a number of functions.

Have a card removed from the spread deck as before. After the card is taken, close up the cards but hold a little finger break at the point the card was removed from. Turn the deck slightly horizontal in preparation for the Classic Pass. All these moves should blend into one continuous motion.

As you turn and make your comment about not wanting to see the chosen card, you perform a slow Classic Pass. If you look down at your hands while doing this, you will see the bottom card of the top half of the deck (your key card) come into and out of your line of sight for just a moment. This is automatic if the deck is held almost horizontally when you begin. The card will come into view at the base of your right hand and be completely hidden from anyone else but you. A second later, the card is gone as the Pass is completed!

The move should really begin just as you are about half turned away. You can, of course, wait until you are turned all the way from the spectator, but the turning action helps cover any motion of the cards. Your hand cover will also be perfect when you make the move in this way. When you are done, the cards are back in a face-down position in your hand. All the audience sees is you holding a face-down deck in your hands, turning away for a second and then turning back. There seems to be no room for trickery.

I love this move as it utilizes the Pass for an entirely different purpose, that of glimpsing a card. It also uses the move in its normal way for the secondary purpose of cutting the deck

so as to leave it in stacked condition. After the effect is over, you can simply return the selected card to the top of the deck and continue. If you practice this enough, you will find it to be automatic and instantaneous.

## The Card Case Peek

This is the piece de resistance. I love this method and use it constantly. I shall give you the basic working first and then a couple of variations. The method uses for its secret an ungaffed card case of the Bicycle type or similar design.

For this peek it is best to have the spectator select a card from the deck by cutting the cards in his own hands. He then takes the top or bottom card. You pick up the card case and hold it in your right hand with the flap side down and the opening to your left. Your right thumb and first finger should be holding the case at the end, capturing the two small tabs. Your left hand holds the flap of the case with the thumb on top and forefinger underneath.

Invite the spectator to insert the deck face-down into the case. Let the cards slide home as you right hand swivels over away from you about a half turn. As the deck turns face up, you will be able to see the very top edge of the bottom card. This is visible to you alone from your angle of vision. Even though the cards are completely within the case, you will be able to clearly see the card value in the corner and the top of the suit in the center of the card.

A second after you have your peek, the right thumb and forefinger fold in the two tabs and the left hand closes the case by tucking in the large flap. The whole move takes less than a second and is completely invisible from the front! It is a perfect move. It looks as if the face-down deck is inserted into the case and the case closed. There seems to be no opportunity for you to see anything.

There is just one problem that must be addressed. The only cards that you won't be able to clearly see are the Aces. They are the only cards in the deck that do not have the suit value

near the edge of the deck. (The picture cards show just a bit of the suit next to the index and work fine.) Larry Becker suggested one way to overcome this problem. His idea is to cut the slots on the back of the deck about ¼ inch longer and put an additional fold at that point on the back flap. This allows you to see the entire index when you do the move.

I do not like gaffing the deck or case unless it is absolutely necessary. To cut the case just for the sake of these four cards seems like overkill to me. My solution to the problem is to just do the move as I have outlined above. In the rare instance that I look down and only see an A in the corner, I immediately stop and say something to the spectator. As I am talking my left middle finger slightly drags up the Ace about a quarter-inch. I then look back down, see the entire index, shove the card home and close the deck. This happens so rarely that it hardly ever becomes an issue.

There is one more variation that you might like to experiment with. This looks entirely natural and is never questioned. It solves the Ace problem and makes the sighting of any of the bottom cards twice as easy.

If you take back the cards yourself and place them into the case, instead of shoving them all the way home, slide them in about three-quarters of the way and then tilt up the end of the deck to allow them to slide the rest of the way in. If you do this you will see that the bottom or face card of the deck (your key) will sort of “snag” on the box and be left sticking out. You can then knock it home as you get your peek and close the box. It takes just a split second to get the peek.

Once you begin playing with the above idea, I'm sure you will start doing every stacked deck effect you know because the peek is not only so easy and effective, but it is FUN!



# Three Effects With The Osterlind Card System

**A**s mentioned earlier, there is a myriad of tricks possible with a stacked deck. At least half of them can be done with the Osterlind Card System. I am going to give you my favorites here. These are the ones I actually use in my professional shows.

## Real Simple

This will hardly seem like much of a trick to you, but I do it all the time. As a mentalist I don't do sleight of hand with cards. When I use cards I talk about gambling and card games.

One of my favorite effects is to say that every since I was a small child, I could guess a card that someone was thinking of. To demonstrate, I remove the deck, shuffle them and spread them for a selection. As soon as the card is withdrawn, I turn away and have them look at it. By this time, I have gotten my peek. I turn back, stare at the person – *and name it!* Just like that. I don't do anything fancy. I immediately repeat it with the same person or another person. Simple as this is, in the right atmosphere of mentalism, this is exceedingly straightforward and effective. You give the impression you can name any thought of card instantly.

I usually do another “think-a-card” handling after doing the above once or twice. Although it is not original, let me explain my handling.

I am holding the deck facedown in dealing position in my left hand. I pick a person (usually a lady) on my left as I slide my left-hand grip lower down on the deck. I say, “If I flip these cards in front of your eyes, can you see a card?” As I say this, I bring up the deck in front of her face and use my right thumb and forefinger to riffle the cards in front of her eyes. I hold the cards in such a way as to be able to see the faces along with the spectator. The riffle is very fast and does not allow the spectator to

see any one card. I do, however, pause during the riffle to allow one card to show for just a fraction of a second. Then I finish riffling the cards quickly. The pause is literally for a split second and is hardly noticeable.

Let me make this clear. I do not *force* a card; I just hesitate a bit during the riffle and remember whatever card I see. Whatever one I see, she sees! I then say to her, “Did you see one?” She nods. I say, “So fast? OK. Think of it.” Then I name it.

That effect, mixed in with the first, makes for a great little spontaneous demonstration before going into a longer routine. Again, if you think these are too simple to play well, let me advise you to look up some of the card effects that Dunninger used on stage before his mindreading routine. The above effects are exactly along the same lines as his.

## Card Calling

This is one of the primary effects of my stage show. Although the premise is simple I am going to give you all the presentational extras that make this routine a winner. I *always* perform this effect!

Here's what the audience sees: The mentalist talks about playing cards and how he can use his powers at casinos. Getting a man onstage, he explains how it would be impossible for audience members at the back of the audience to see a normal size card. He then removes a jumbo deck and says he will use that. He mixes the cards and lets the spectator pull out a bunch of cards. Turning away, the mentalist names the cards the spectator holds as he thinks of them. The mentalist somehow knows when he is down to just two cards. He asks the spectator to think of either one. He then ends the routine by telling him *exactly* what he was thinking!

To perform this, you must, of course, have a jumbo deck set up in the Osterlind Card System. Begin by talking about casinos and gambling. I personally talk about one casino I am banned from (I really am!). Then I get a man



onstage to help me. (This routine always plays better with a man)

I mention how people in the back of the room would have trouble seeing normal sized cards and bring out the jumbo deck. This usually gets a laugh. I show the cards face up to the assistant as I explain the cards are made by The U.S. Playing Card Company and are exact duplicates of regular-sized cards. I then turn over the deck and explain that the backs are also exact duplicates. I then mention how the only problem is shuffling the cards! I then do a slop shuffle to apparently mix them.

This is a false shuffle where the deck is held in the left hand. The left thumb slides about three-quarters of the cards into the right hand. The right hand takes these cards under the left-hand cards and slides about ten cards off the top under the left-hand cards. The right-hand cards are brought up above the left hand and about ten cards are slid off the bottom of the right-hand cards on top of the left ones. This is repeated until the cards are exhausted. The shuffle does not mix the cards and only acts to cut the deck.

I then fan the cards in front of the spectator and ask him to grab a bunch of cards as a group from anywhere in the deck. I explain that by "bunch," I mean about ten cards. After he takes out the cards, I cut the deck at that point and turn away. (If he takes too many or too few, I immediately grab them back, place them on top and tell him to do it again. This makes the process look very fair.)

I ask him to mix his cards as I approach someone sitting close to the stage. As I am walking, it is a simple matter to tilt the cards enough to spot the bottom card. I hand the cards to that spectator and tell him to make sure they are all mixed up and that there are no duplicates of any of the cards that the spectator on stage might have. I then leave the cards with him as I walk back to the center of the stage.

All this time, I have my back to the assistant. I ask him to fan the cards in front of his eyes as though he were playing a game of poker or gin rummy, making sure he can see every card. Once he has the cards spread, I tell him

to look at the cards, one card at a time, moving from one card, to the next, to the next. Suddenly I say, "Wait! Go back to the 3 of clubs!" (or whatever the first card is). I say, "Remove it and hold it up!" As he does so, I take it and show the audience.

Then I say, "Keep looking. Wait! That was the 9 of Hearts!" I name the next card in the system. Notice how I make it appear *that* was the card he was just looking at, but I do not say it in such a way as to make him challenge me. It could have been the card he looked at three cards ago or one he sees out of the corner of his eye. To the audience, however, it is the card he was concentrating on at that moment.

Again I take the card, hold it up and continue. Since the cards are jumbo cards and he only gave them a few quick shuffles, most of the cards will be right next to each other in the system. This makes the illusion that I am naming the cards, as he looks at them, even stronger. I keep naming the cards, occasionally gazing in his direction to see how many he has left. When I see he has only three or four, I turn away.

When I get down to two, I say, "Even though I am not looking at you, I believe you only have two cards left. Is that right?" When he responds, "Yes," I say, "OK. Think of either card right now!"

Let's say he has the 4 of Hearts and the 10 of Clubs left. I say to the audience, "See! First he thought of the 4 of Hearts! Then he changed his mind to the 10 of Clubs! Then he changed it back to the 4 of Hearts!" Believe me, the spectator *always* just laughs and holds up both cards! I have done this routine thousands of times and that is how they *always* respond! It gives the impression that they tried to trick you by changing their mind, but you got them anyway! This routine is a real money routine!

You can do this with a normal size deck of cards in front of a smaller group. I sometimes use that approach at trade shows. The larger deck, however, does add a lot to the routine whenever you have more than about twenty people present.

## Cards in Pocket

This is one of my favorite routines. I always do this whenever I am doing close-up. I usually use it right after performing my Radar Deck.

False shuffle the deck and hand it to the spectator. Have him give the deck a complete cut while holding the cards in his hands. Let him do it once or twice to make sure he has it down and knows what to do. Now move back a step or two and turn your back. Have him cut the deck again. Ask him if he is satisfied. If not, tell him to cut it again.

When he is finished cutting, tell him to remove the top card without looking at it and place it into his right coat pocket. Now have him take the next card without looking at that one either and place it into his left pocket. Take back the deck and put it into the case, getting a glimpse of the bottom card. Hand the cased deck to someone to hold.

Stand in front of the spectator and say, "Even though there is no way for me to know this, I have a feeling about the (say) 7 of Clubs (pause) and the 4 of Spades! Yes. 7 of Clubs and 4 of spades! (pause) What one do you want to be in what pocket?"

It is funny to see the reactions here. Usually, the spectator thinks you are kidding. Prod him to answer you. Nine out of ten times, they will name the first card to be in their right pocket. That is what you want! If he does, immediately say, "Then take it out!" Your directness will startle everyone and when he takes out the right card, they will be floored. Finish with the second card.

Should he name the wrong card, say "Did you change your mind?" If he says, "Yes," say, "I thought so. Now take the 7 of Clubs out of your right pocket." You still end very strong. If he says, "No," then you have to say, "That's why you shouldn't play cards! I want the 7 of Clubs to be in your *right* pocket." This gets a laugh and still ends well. It's not as strong as the first ending, but is still very good. The nine times out of ten that you do end the right way, makes the few times it goes wrong worth it.

## Bonus Routines

These 2 routines have appeared in print before. "Test Condition Card Trick" first appeared in my lecture notes, *Rich With A Twist*, in 1989. At the same time, I was teaching another test-condition effect in my lectures, which I called "Magician Fooler." Ken Krenzel had given the germ of both of these ideas to me. He is a wonderful card worker, thinker and great friend.

Since many new magicians may be experiencing my stack for the first time, I want to include both these ideas, as they are routines I do and have done since the beginning of the system. They both represent some of the strongest magic *anywhere*. They are what I use when I don't have much time and I want to achieve maximum impact. In addition, the new Card Case Peek now makes both of these effects even stronger.

### Test Condition Card Trick

The deck is stacked and ready to go. As you are casually false shuffling and cutting the deck, you ask an audience member to think of a card. Explain that they should think carefully about it and not choose a common card like an Ace.

There is room for humor here. For example you could say, "Please think of any card in the deck. Please do not think of an obvious card such as the Ace of Spades or the Queen of Hearts because everyone thinks of them. Of course, you may be thinking that by mentioning them I am trying to sway you and steer you away from certain cards, so choose them if you like. Of course, now you are thinking, 'Maybe he *does* want me to think of the Ace of Spades!'" You can see the possibilities.)

After they have a card in mind, hand them the deck and ask them to cut it once (that's just for show!). Now explain that you want them to follow your instructions *to the letter* as you are going to create test conditions and if they don't listen, they will spoil the conditions. I usually



say, “If you don’t do what I ask you will break the test conditions. Then you will go home and say, ‘Maybe the guy did this or that.’”

Turn your back on the spectators. Ask them to fan the cards in front of their eyes and look for their card.

Say, “When you see it, don’t take it out or touch it. Instead, just stop. Now, cut all the cards in front of your card to the back of the deck. In other words, take all the cards in front of your card and move them to the back of the deck so that your card is on the face.” (Here you may want to use your two hands to demonstrate what you want him to do.)

As soon as it is done you say, “Notice, that even if I were facing you, there is no way I could see either the front or back of your card. So, even if the cards were marked, and they’re not, it would be impossible to know your card. Besides, I am looking away in the first place!” All this gets a laugh, but impresses the spectator of how impossible it would be for you to know their card.

Next say, “OK, now take your card, just your card, and slide it off the face of the deck and bury it in the middle.” Turn back with the empty card case and hold it open for the spectator to slide the deck into. Get your peek as you close the case. Hand the cased deck to another spectator

Now say, “If I were to go through that deck and find your card, would you be impressed?” Usually the spectator responds in the affirmative.

Regardless of what he says, you say, “Let’s not use the deck. Just think of your card.” Then name it! “The Eight of Diamonds!” You will knock him over like a cannon! Don’t try to embellish it or do something fancy. Just name it! There seems to be no way you could do that. The spectator thinks you are kidding and then you destroy them!

Believe me, I have done this effect for over 20 years. I have used it for CEOs of some of the nation’s top companies. I have used it in countless magician conventions. It destroys everyone! It very simply is the single best card trick I know!

## Magician Fooler

This is one I only do sometimes. It is strictly for magicians or for the so-very-smart spectator who knows how everything is done. The deck is stacked. You do your false shuffles and cuts. Now spread the cards between your hands and offer him a card. Make sure you make it obvious that it is a free choice.

As soon as the card is removed, use your right ring finger under the spread cards to put a slight downward crimp in the lower right corner of the card that was above the selection. As soon as you do this, drop the cards on the table! That’s right. Just drop them down in spread condition and walk away.

Ask the person to look at their card, put it back anywhere in the deck and shuffle it. Now take back the deck and as you ask, “Do you think I can find it now?” locate the crimped card and cut it to the bottom. Regardless of the answer, pick up the card case and place the deck in it, getting your peek. Build up how impossible everything is. Then end by naming the card.

In this instance, what I like to do as a sort of red herring and for drama, is to write down the name of the card on a piece of paper and lay it on the table. Some magicians may think you are going to use a nail writer. When you have them announce their card and then tell them to open the prediction themselves, you will blow them away.

Make sure that the crimp is not too large. If the deck is fairly new, only a very slight crimp is necessary. Since that card ends up on the face of the deck, it is never noticed when the cards are removed. If you leave the deck with the person as a souvenir, the crimp will be worn off in just a short time. If you remove the deck for other effects, it is a simple matter to take out the crimp since you know just where it is.



*This is about the most comprehensive work on the Osterlind Card System to date. These ideas and routines have never been published before and have been in my repertoire for years. In recent years, a book called Chan Canasta: A Remarkable Man by David Britland was published. Although I never saw Chan Canasta perform, it is obvious we both think the same way. Many of the card experiments contained in that book can be worked using the Osterlind Card System. There are also numerous effects by Koran, Annemann and others that the Osterlind Card System cannot help but improve.*

## About The Author



Richard Osterlind has been a prolific performer and creator of mentalism and magic for his entire life. Besides doing scores of shows yearly for Fortune 500 companies, he's found time to create some of mentalism and magic's most original effects. Besides the Osterlind

Breakthrough Card System, he's the originator of the Slow-Motion Surrounded Center Tear, the Radar Deck, Industrial Strength Link, Thought Scan, the Apex Stainless Steel Billfold, the Epitome and Ultra Boards, and many others.

His published works include *Dynamic Mysteries*, *Three Miracle Routines*, *Two Perfected Routines* and *The Very Modern Mindreader*. He has appeared in the *Challenge Magic* video in addition to the forthcoming *Mind Mysteries* video series from L&L Publishing.

**For more of Richard Osterlind's mentalism  
and magic creations, be sure to visit  
Osterlind Mysteries  
(<http://www.osterlindmysteries.com>).**